



Congresswoman **Lois Capps**

SPECIAL REPORT ON SENIORS ISSUES

We Must Modernize Medicare

For years, Medicare has played a vital role in the health care of American seniors. It has many strengths, including the ability for seniors to choose their own doctor. But the time has come to fix Medicare's most glaring problems.

The most serious hole in the Medicare safety net is the lack of prescription drug coverage. As a member of the Subcommittee on Health, I am working hard to enact a prescription drug benefit as part of Medicare. In the wealthiest nation on earth, it is unconscionable for seniors to have to choose between paying the

rent, buying groceries, or purchasing the medicines they need to stay healthy.

The drug plan I support would be voluntary, affordable, and reliable (see box). Unfortunately, the legislation being pushed by the House leadership falls far short. This proposal – which I oppose – relies on unwilling insurance companies to provide spotty coverage. And coverage may not be available to all seniors. This should not be a partisan issue, and I hope we can pass a strong prescription drug bill soon.

The lack of affordable medications only exacerbates existing health coverage problems for Central Coast seniors. Many Medicare HMOs have left our area; others have increased premiums and cut back on benefits -- despite my successful efforts to raise federal payments to these plans. I helped pass into law legislation to



help Medicare HMOs stay in the area longer and let seniors move between plans at any time. I have also made proposals to ensure any additional funds for Medicare HMOs are directed to plans that provide coverage in rural areas and include basic benefits, like brand name drug coverage. Sadly, the majority party voted these proposals down.

Our health care system breaks down when there aren't enough doctors and nurses. Please turn to the next page for an in-depth look at my efforts to end the nursing shortage.

Many Central Coast doctors are not taking on more Medicare patients because an obscure formula has cut their rate of reimbursement. I introduced the Medicare Physicians Protection Act to retract that cut and keep our doctors in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties. The citizens of the Central Coast – young and old alike – deserve nothing less.

The Capps Prescription Drug Plan

- Expands existing Medicare program
- Does not rely on insurance companies
- Strictly voluntary
- Covers all seniors
- Affordable premiums, co-pays, and deductibles

Responding to the Nursing Shortage

The national shortage of nurses poses a great danger to the health care of all Americans, especially seniors. And the attacks of September 11 have focused even more attention on this problem. In California, there are 20,000 fewer nurses than we need. There aren't enough new nurses joining the workforce. Something must be done.

I drew on my 28 years of nursing experience when drafting my Nurse Reinvestment Act, versions of which have already passed the

House and Senate. My bill provides scholarships to train more nurses and programs to let them work off their loans by serving in nursing homes. And it provides special training for nurses who work in geriatric care.

There is an obvious connection between the nursing shortage and quality of care. One

comprehensive survey recently found that patients in understaffed hospitals are more likely to suffer complications, stay in the hospital longer, and even die from treatable conditions. Passage of the Nurse Reinvestment Act will be a significant step forward, especially for our nation's seniors. I expect the final bill will soon go to the President for his signature.



Congresswoman Lois Capps introduces her landmark Nurse Reinvestment Act. Char Hill, a nurse from Santa Maria, is on the left.

The War Against Disease

The advances of modern medicine and technology have helped countless Central Coast residents in their battles against debilitating diseases. And the federal government plays an important role in funding research that leads to these breakthroughs.

I am very proud that the first law I passed in Congress was the ALS Treatment and Assistance Act. Inspired by former Santa Barbara County Supervisor Tom Rogers, this legislation provides Medicare coverage for patients with Lou Gehrig's disease. I have also worked hard to increase research funding for Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes.

Cardiac arrest and strokes kill at least 360,000 Americans each year. As the co-chair of the Congressional Heart and Stroke Coalition, I have introduced two bills to help health care officials across the Central Coast and the nation prevent and treat these episodes. The Community Access to Emergency Defibrillation Act – just enacted into law – will help communities purchase and place AEDs in public places. The STOP Stroke Act will broaden awareness of stroke and its symptoms, and help localities improve stroke treatment readiness.

Finally, I have teamed up with Senator Dianne Feinstein to introduce the National Cancer Act. I call this comprehensive bill the "Marshall Plan" for cancer because it would dramatically increase federal resources to fight a disease which touches the lives of millions of Americans. The National Cancer Act would increase funding for research, train scientists and caregivers, create tax incentives to produce new medicines, and improve preventive care.

Safeguarding Social Security

Central Coast seniors have spent their lifetimes contributing to the vitality of our communities – and paying into Social Security. They are entitled to the benefits they have earned.

We must never take the “security” out of Social Security by privatizing the program. The stock market has dropped about 30% over the past three years. Imagine the financial suffering this would have caused if retirees had their Social Security benefits tied up exclusively in the market.

In addition, Social Security is structured to meet the special needs of women, who live longer and earn less than men, and take time from the workforce to raise and care for their families. These safeguards are diminished in a privatized system. Finally, privatizing Social Security would drain away the revenues needed to pay today’s beneficiaries.

I have voted to make it easier to help people save for retirement – supporting tax cuts and increases in the amount that can be contributed to IRAs and 401k plans. But Social Security must remain what it is today, a public trust between generations. It must never be privatized. Social Security is a sacred promise that must never be broken.

Congresswoman Lois Capps meets with seniors at Vista Del Monte in Santa Barbara to discuss Social Security, Medicare and prescription drugs.



Protecting Our Pensions

The collapse of Enron exposed major flaws in our nation’s pension system. While top executives got rich, thousands of Enron employees lost their entire retirement savings because they didn’t have the information and control they needed to manage their investments. Congress must act to ensure that workers around the country are protected from similar outrages in the future.

I am a strong supporter of legislation that would close the “Enron loopholes” and preserve retirement security. This bill would give employees the ability to invest as they choose – not just in their company’s stock. It would treat workers and executives the same, by providing prior notice of any “blackout” periods during which trading company stock is prohibited. And it would allow employees to get professional investment advice.

Central Coast workers who put years of their life into a company should be able to retire knowing their pensions and 401k savings plans are secure. I remain hopeful that Congress will enact these critical protections into law.

Important Phone Numbers & Web Sites

Social Security

1-800-772-1213

www.ssa.gov

Medicare

1-800-MEDICARE

1-800-HHS-TIPS (to report
waste and fraud)

www.medicare.gov

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

www.hcfa.gov

Department of Veterans Affairs Health Benefits

1-877-222-VETS

www.va.gov/vbs/health

TRICARE Senior Pharmacy Program

1-877-DOD-MEDS

www.tricare.osd.mil

Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP)

1-800-434-0222

www.slonet.org/~seniors/hicap

California Department of Managed Health Care

1-888-HMO-2219

www.hmohelp.ca.gov

U.S. Administration on Aging

1-800-677-1116

www.aoa.gov

Area Agency on Aging

1-800-510-2020

www.slonet.org/~seniors

Adult Protective Services

1-800-834-3002



Honoring Our Veterans

Many Central Coast seniors are veterans who served our nation in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, or other conflicts. These brave Americans and their families deserve the most we can provide. Since coming to Congress, I have done everything in my power to make the government live up to its promises to veterans.

I have worked hard to sustain and improve the services offered by the VA clinics in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo. I have also championed legislation that would allow Central Coast veterans to receive care at local facilities, instead of having to drive long distances to VA hospitals.

The recent increase in VA prescription drug copayments is unwarranted and unfair, and I have cosponsored legislation to

reverse it. I also strongly support efforts to allow disabled veterans to receive both their disability compensation and their military retired pay.

Finally, as the proud author of the VETS Act — legislation to set up a full-time national veteran's hotline — I am pleased to have helped pass a bill to extend the VA's helpline phone services. This is a long overdue first step to ensuring our vets have easy access to important information about benefits.



Congresswoman Lois Capps meets with a leader of the RAMS in San Luis Obispo to hear the concerns he and other retirees have about pensions and veterans benefits.

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